



# Revisionist History: The Moscow Patriarchate's Rejection of the Catacomb Church & Synod Abroad

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The October 2023 edition of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, the official journal of the Russian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarchate, recently published an article written by Father Peter Ivanov, entitled “Have a Good Memory: On the 80th Anniversary of the Election of Patriarch Sergius at the Hierarchal Council of 1943” which is an essay dedicated to Sergius, the so-called Patriarch of Moscow, of sorry memory, who sold the Russian Orthodox Church to the God-hating Soviet authorities in 1927 with his Declaration of subservience to the Soviet regime. That article, which is written in celebration of the 80th anniversary of Sergius’ usurpation as the Patriarchal *locum tenens* and the Patriarch of Moscow, is filled with a spirit of historical revisionism. At the beginning of the article, the author briefly discusses the events of the 1940’s where Orthodox Christians were subjected to cruel persecutions at the hands of the godless Soviets and were murdered for their faith. However, after this short paragraph he proceeds to describe how Sergius came to power and this is where the revisionism comes about.



Sergianist Robber Council of 1943

Father Ivanov in his attempt to link the legitimate Patriarchate of Saint Tikhon to the ill-gotten Patriarchal throne acquired by Sergius states that:

The heavy burden of Church leadership in these circumstances fell to Metropolitan Sergius [...] He was a zealous missionary, an outstanding theologian, and a prominent church figure from the pre-revolutionary era. He was appointed as the Deputy *Locum Tenens* in December 1925. However, he was soon imprisoned and only resumed his activities in 1927 when he issued the “Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius,” which met with rejection from some of the clergy and believers due to statements in the document that indicated concessions or a search for compromise with the Soviet regime [1].

In this article, Father Ivanov makes a brief mention of the new martyrs and those persecuted but when describing how Sergius came to power he fails to mention any history concerning the three legitimate Metropolitans who were in the will of Saint Tikhon as his legitimate and canonical successors. “Before his death the Patriarch had drawn up a new provision for his succession, naming Metropolitan Kirill [Smirnov of Kazansk], Metropolitan Agafangel [Preobrozhenskiy of Yaroslavsk], and Peter [Polanskiy of Krutitsk] as his choices for the post of *locum tenens*. As both Kirill and Agafangel were still in exile, Metropolitan Peter Krutitskii was proclaimed acting head of the Church before a gathering of sixty bishops” before Sergius’ act of betrayal and schism when he issued his infamous declaration to the godless Soviets where he capitulated the entire Church to its persecutors [2].



Cover of the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate,  
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This complete surrendering of the Russian Orthodox Church to its Soviet persecutors was no less than an act of schism, on par with the betrayal of the former apostle Judas, which rendered any legitimacy of Sergius void and placed him outside of the Church. Father Ivanov then goes on to describe Sergius’ usurpation of the position of *locum tenens* on December 27th, 1936 stating that “the Patriarchate issued the ‘Act on the Transfer of Rights and Duties of the *Locum Tenens* of the Patriarchal Throne of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Deputy of the *Locum Tenens*, His Eminence Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna Sergius (Stragorodsky)’”[3]. The revisionist part of this story by Father Ivanov is that there was no functioning Patriarchate inasmuch as Saint Tikhon was the last legitimate Patriarch before his death.

It is clear that Sergius did, in fact, have the intent to usurp the powers of the still-living and canonical *locum tenens* in that “he assumed the title of His Beatitude the Metropolitan of Moscow (which took place on April 14/27, 1934) at a time when he was still holding the title of Deputy “*Locum Tenens*.” Though only a deputy at that time, Metropolitan Sergei clearly showed by his action that he was putting himself above the person for whom he was deputed to serve” [4]. Furthermore, in 1936, Saint Peter of Krutitsk was still alive and the legitimate canonical *locum tenens*, albeit in prison, and would not be martyred until 1937. During this time period there was no one that had the legitimate authority to transfer the *locum tenens* position and its authority to Sergius. In the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, No. 1, 1931, Sergius himself writes in an article entitled “*On the Authority of the Patriarchal Locum Tenens and His Deputy*” stating that, “When the *Locum Tenens* leaves his position (due to death, resignation, or the like), the Deputy’s authority ceases at the same moment. It is self-evident that with the *Locum Tenens*’ return to office, the Deputy ceases to govern” [5].



Saint Peter of Krutitsa, Canonical Locum Tenens of the Patriarchal Throne

Here we can see that the Moscow Patriarchate revisionists are trying to change the order of historical events in order to establish a legal and canonical position by which Sergius can claim that he was the rightful heir to the position of the canonical *locum tenens* of Saint Peter of Krutitsk and therefore the Patriarchal Throne of Saint Tikhon. But in reality, this legitimate patriarchal authority died with Saint Peter of Krutitsk under the godless Soviets and the only legitimate continuation of the Russian Orthodox Church that existed was in the Catacomb Church under the leadership chiefly of Saint Joseph of Petrograd and Saint Cyril of Kazan (the last living person who had been designated by Saint Tikhon to be a *locum tenens*) and in the Russian Church Abroad under the Synod which was first led by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), who was a permanent sitting member of the legitimate synod of the Russian Orthodox Church under Saint Tikhon, and later by his successor Metropolitan Anastasius (Gribanovsky) who was also a sitting member of the canonical Russian Orthodox Synod under Saint Tikhon.

Father Ivanov writes concerning the 1943 Sergianist Council which “elected” Sergius as Patriarch of Moscow that, “a declaration was adopted condemning the traitors of faith and the homeland, which condemned those representatives of the clergy and laity who had disgraced themselves by collaborating with the occupying authorities, betraying their compatriots, and supporting the fascists, including using their protection to cause schisms. The Council members expressed their gratitude to the Soviet government in a message and also distributed an “Appeal to All Christians of the World” calling for the defeat of fascism” [6]. Father Ivanov then quotes Sergius and his address to this council in which he states:

By this act, our Russian Church received the fullness of canonical leadership, administration, and intercession. However, the strength of Christ’s Church lies not in its external beauty and grandeur. The Church, like a tapestry, is adorned with the blood of martyrs, the labors of the righteous, the great efforts of the hierarchs, and other servants of God. Therefore, I call on all faithful children of the Church to live a Christian life of virtue, so that our Orthodox Church may be adorned with the beauty of Christian virtues [7].

What is ironic about this statement from Sergius is that in his own revisionist statement he tries to prop up his Soviet-created church on the blood of the martyrs who he had denied were being persecuted just a few years prior in a public statement in 1930. In an interview to a member of the Soviet Press, it is recorded that Metropolitan Sergius “in response to questions he denied flatly that there was persecution of religion in the U.S.S.R. While churches were sometimes closed, this was done according to the wishes of the population. Punishment inflicted upon priests was not a result of their religious status, but was a consequence of the refusal of some of them to be loyal to the Soviet regime” [8].



The Hiero-Confessor Patriarch Tikhon and Metropolitan Anthony (Sitting Left of St Tikhon) at the All-Russian Council of 1917-1918.

As we can see, Father Ivanov and the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* most certainly have a revisionist agenda to portray Sergius in the most favorable light as possible. We can see that this agenda goes back directly to the 1943 council and the pseudo-bishops who “elected” Sergius, who himself was selected by Stalin to be the Patriarch while “those bishops who disagreed with him [Sergius] had already been eliminated from his path by Stalin” [9]. In a statement made contemporaneously with these events that led to the so-called election of Sergius, Father Ivanov quotes Archbishop Gregory of Saratov who

“spoke about Patriarch Sergius as the spiritual successor to Saint Tikhon: ‘In the consciousness of all believing Russian people, the Russian Orthodox Church has remained patriarchal. Russian Orthodox people did not follow the reformers, the Gregorians, the Josephites, the autocephalists, and other self-appointed gatherings led by power-hungry bishops and their supporters... Metropolitan Sergius had to bear a heavy cross; it was a sorrowful path he had to tread. Not all bishops recognized him, and enemies of the Church sought to spread malicious rumors about him. But he... remembered the words of Christ: ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’” [10].

This false statement, like many of the Moscow Patriarchate's statements, attempts to grant Sergius a sense of legitimacy by claiming that the Russian Orthodox people refused to join the Russian Catacomb Church or the Russian Church Abroad. Instead, they attempt to portray that the Russian Orthodox people only stayed with the Soviet-created Sergianist organ, not recognizing either the Russian Catacomb Church, led chiefly by Saint Joseph of Petrograd, or the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad led by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), one of the last remaining canonical bishops who, seated directly next to Patriarch Tikhon during the All-Russian Council of 1917-1918, was a permanent member of the council and one of the most senior hierarchs in the Russian Church. "Many thousands of faithful left the Church in opposition to Sergi's declaration and went underground; they formed various groups which in time became known as the True Orthodox Church or True Orthodox Christians" [11], [12].

According to Saint John of San Francisco, who was living outside of the reach of the godless Soviets, in his brief book *The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad: A Short History* he writes concerning the Soviet false church that:



Troparion — Tone 4 Today the Church of Russia joyfully forms a chorus, / praising her New Martyrs and Confessors; / hierarchs and priests, royal passion-bearers, right-believing princes and princesses, / venerable men and women, and all Orthodox Christians. / Having laid down their life for faith in Christ during the days of godless persecution, / they preserved the truth by the shedding of blood. / By their protection, O long-suffering Lord, / preserve our land in Orthodoxy until the end of the age.

In Russia itself there were courageous confessors from among the imprisoned bishops and likewise among those who remained in freedom, who declared to Metropolitan Sergius their denouncement of the agreement with the godless regime which persecuted the Church. Many of them even broke off communion in prayer with Metropolitan Sergius, as one who had “fallen” (i.e. schism) and had entered into league with the godless, and a part of the clergy and laity in Russia followed them. The godless Soviet regime cruelly persecuted such steadfast hierarchs and their followers. The Soviet regime, not having fulfilled its promises to Metropolitan Sergius, which had prompted him to enter into agreement with it, was at the same time depriving of freedom, banishing, and even executing many who did not recognize his declaration [13].

In this statement clearly endorsed by Father Ivanov and the Moscow Patriarchate, they are rejecting the Russian Catacomb Church, Saint Joseph of Petrograd the New Martyr and those Catacomb Christians who are referred to as the “Josephites” as well as the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, referred to as either the “autocephalists” or the “self-appointed [...] power-hungry bishops.” As we can see from the quote by Archbishop Gregory of Saratov and the Moscow Patriarchate’s incorporation of it into their official journal for the 80th anniversary celebration of Sergius, they considered these two parts of the legitimate Russian Orthodox Church who did not capitulate to the godless Soviets as being “led by power-hungry bishops and their supporters” [14]. It should also be noted that the Moscow Patriarchate today still does not recognize Saint Joseph of Petrograd as a Saint and that the Synodal Canonization Commission of the Moscow Patriarchate in 2012 quietly removed 36 new martyrs from the Church Calendar. According to Igumen Damaskin, a member of the commission, “We have a new, corrected Church calendar. If we are Church people and understand what the Church hierarchy is, then we need to perceive this new calendar as a Church document that guides us” and that this removal has “been confirmed and blessed by Patriarch Kirill” [15].

Father Ivanov with his revisionist agenda attempts to justify and legitimize the Sergianist council of 1943 and its decisions, as well as to subtly de-legitimize the Russian Catacomb Church and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. In his final paragraph he attacks the legitimate leaders of the free parts of the Russian Orthodox Church as proud, comfortable pietists in remote regions and canonical legalists, and refuses to recognize the canonical existence of those in the Russian Catacombs or the Church Abroad. Father Ivanov, in revisionist fashion, entirely ignores the earlier writings of Sergius who, before his self-imposed enslavement, stated to the Hierarchs of the Synod Abroad that:



St. Joseph of Petrograd, Leader of the Catacomb Church and "Josephite" faithful.

You ask me to be a judge in a matter of which I completely have no knowledge... Can the Moscow Patriarch, in general, be the leader of the ecclesiastical life of Orthodox emigrants?...The good of church affairs demands that you, by common consent, establish for yourselves a central organ of church administration that is sufficiently authoritative to resolve all misunderstandings and disagreements and has the power to cut short any misunderstandings and every disobedience, without resorting to our support [16].

However, as stated previously, Father Ivanov subtly attacks the Russian Catacomb Church and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad by calling them “disgraced” in his final paragraph in

which he is justifying Sergius’ capitulation to the Soviet powers and the decisions of the Sergianist council of 1943 by saying that these decisions were:

Received with joy and hope—for every Orthodox person, the meaning was clear: the Church is alive! However, this definition faced a diverse range of criticisms and attacks from the proud and comfortable piety of remote regions, the pleasing and inventive canonical legalism far removed from religion, and the lack of true altruism in political planning that, as is now clear, would have welcomed the demise of the Russian Church even then. There is no shortage of such critiques. All of them have been disgraced by the subsequent history of the Russian Orthodox Church, which, relying on the spiritual legacy of Patriarch Sergius, guided by its Primate, gradually overcame the tragic consequences of the era of persecution and, through revival, entered a period of flourishing [17].

On full display for all to see, the Moscow Patriarchate makes no attempt to hide what they truly think of Sergius, who in 1927 betrayed the Church to the godless Soviet powers, in 1930 denied the persecution and martyrdom of those being murdered by the hands of the government he pledged absolute loyalty to, and wrote of the soviet regime that their “joys and successes are our joys and successes and whose failures, are our failures” [18]. “Several decades later, this perspective was echoed by Patriarch Kirill who stated, ‘Patriarch Sergius did not compromise anything of fundamental significance for the mission that the Church is called to fulfill, and his compromise with the authorities extended only to the sphere that was considered important by the authorities but was not essential for the cause of human salvation’” which, for Orthodox Christians loyal to God and not a worldly regime, this is just another example of the historical revisionism of the Moscow Patriarchate [19].

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